

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4064

INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL

ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 06101

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, CA

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT DEBATES NATIONAL UNITY

1. SUMMARY. THIS PAST WEEK'S PARLIAMENT DEBATE ON NATIONAL UNITY, THE FIRST SUCH DEBATE BY PARLIAMENT SINCE THE NOVEMBER 15 PARTI QUEBECOIS (PQ) VICTORY, PRODUCED NO SURPRISES AND ONLY OCCASIONAL SIGNS OF EMOTION, BUT IT DID HELP TO CLARIFY THE BROAD DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN THEIR APPROACHES TOWARDS QUEBEC, SPECIFICALLY, AND TOWARDS THE PRESERVATION OF THE CONFEDERATION, GENERALLY. THE DEBATE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE LIBERALS ARE STILL PLACING PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON BILINGUALISM AND THE NEED FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ENGLISH-SPEAKING AND FRENCH-SPEAKING CANADIANS AND THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES FAVOR VARIOUS TYPES OF DECENTRALIZATION TO GRANT QUEBEC AND THE OTHER PROVINCES MORE AUTHORITY IN CERTAIN FIELDS. THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, HOWEVER, DIFFER ON WHETHER DECENTRALIZATION SHOULD COME THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE OR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OR BOTH AND HOW MUCH ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY THE PROVINCES SHOULD HAVE. WE BELIEVE THAT EVENTUALLY TRUDEAU HIMSELF WILL ALSO HAVE TO CLARIFY IN WHAT WAYS HE WOULD BE WILLING TO SEE

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CANADIAN FEDERALISM ALTERED, BUT HE SEEMS IN NO HURRY TO DO SO, AND JUDGING FROM RECENT POLLS, THE ELECTORATE SEEMS TO BE PATIENT ON THIS MATTER. END SUMMARY.

2. TRUDEAU. IN AN UNINSPIRING AND PEDANTIC FASHION, THE PRIME MINISTER OPENED THE DEBATE BY STRESSING, AS HE HAS IN NEARLY EVERY PRESS CONFERENCE AND SPEECH DURING THE

PAST EIGHT MONTHS, THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS BILINGUALISM PROGRAM AND THE NEED FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ANGLOPHONES AND FRANCOPHONES. ("ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADIANS WILL HAVE TO OPEN THEIR HEARTS, TO OPEN THEIR MINDS TO UNDERSTAND THAT FRENCH-CANADIANS STILL DO NOT FEEL TREATED AS FULLY EQUAL PARTNERS IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY, OR EVEN IN THE PROVINCE WHERE THEY FORM A MAJORITY.") TRUDEAU INDICATED ONCE MORE THAT HE IS WILLING TO CONSIDER BASIC CHANGES IN THE FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS AND IN THE CONSTITUTION, BUT HE AGAIN FAILED TO GIVE ANY INKLING OF WHAT HE THOUGHT THESE CHANGES SHOULD BE.

3. TRUDEAU CONCLUDED HIS REMARKS ON ANTI-CLIMACTIC NOTE BY CONFIRMING WHAT EVERYONE HAD KNOWN FOR SOME WEEKS, NAMELY THAT HE WAS ESTABLISHING A "NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON CANADIAN UNITY" TO BE HEADED BY JEAN-LUC PEPIN, FORMER HEAD OF THE ANTI INFLATION BOARD, AND JOHN ROBARTS, FORMER PREMIER OF ONTARIO. THE OTHER FIVE MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE ARE JOHN EVANS, PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO; RICHARD CASHIN, A FORMER LIBERAL MP WHO NOW IS A MEMBER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND PRESIDENT OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERMEN, FOOD AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION; MURIEL KOVITZ, CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, A DIRECTOR OF IMPERIAL OIL LTD. AND OF CENTENNIAL PACKERS OF CANADA LTD. AND AN EXECUTIVE OF THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS; ROSS MARKS, MAYOR OF 100 MILE

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HOUSE, B.C.; AND CLAUDE CASTONGUAY, A FORMER LIBERAL CABINET MINISTER IN QUEBEC. ACCORDING TO TRUDEAU, THE MANDATE OF THE TASK FORCE WILL BE TO SUPPORT, ENCOURAGE AND PUBLICIZE THE EFFORTS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC, AND PARTICULARLY OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, TO ENHANCE CANADIAN UNITY; TO PUBLICIZE THE ACTIVITIES OF SUCH GROUPS AND TO PUT THEM IN TOUCH WITH ONE ANOTHER; AND TO HELP TO DEVELOP PROCESSES FOR STRENGTHENING CANADIAN UNITY AND PROVIDE A SOURCE OF ADVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT ON UNITY ISSUES.

4. CLARK. DURING WHAT MANY OBSERVERS REGARD AS ONE OF HIS BEST SPEECHES, THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE LEADER LASHED OUT AT TRUDEAU FOR PLACING SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON BILINGUALISM AS A PANACEA FOR DISUNITY IN THE COUNTRY AND FOR FAILING TO GIVE GREATER IMPORTANCE TO IMPROVING THE ECONOMY AND REMOVING REGIONAL DISPARITIES, ("THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE RESENTMENT TOWARDS THE BILINGUALISM PROGRAM WHICH EXISTS IN THE COUNTRY . . . WE MUST ALSO FACE THE FACT THAT INCREASED USE OF FRENCH OUTSIDE OF QUEBEC IS, IN ITSELF, NO ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM IN QUEBEC.") CLARK ALSO

ARGUED FORCEFULLY THAT FEDERALISTS MUST CONVINCE QUEBECKERS THAT THEIR CHOICE IN A REFERENDUM IS NOT BETWEEN THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE STATUS QUO AND THE PEQUISTE FORMULA BUT BETWEEN A NEW FORM OF FEDERALISM AND INDEPENDENCE FOR QUEBEC. THEREFORE, OTTAWA MUST BE WILLING TO MAKE BOTH ADMINISTRATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO GRANT QUEBEC AND OTHER PROVINCES MORE AUTHORITY. IN CLARK'S WORDS, THE BEST HOPE FOR PRESERVING NATIONAL UNITY IS THROUGH

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"MORE REGIONALLY-BASED FEDERALISM."

5. BROADBENT. LIKE CLARK, THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) LEADER ATTACKED TRUDEAU FOR RELYING SO HEAVILY ON BILINGUALISM, BUT HE TODK ISSUE WITH CLARK'S CONCEPT OF DECENTRALIZATION. ("I ASK THE PRIME MINISTER TO GET OVER HIS ILLUSION THAT THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT IS A MOTIVATING FORCE IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY . . . WE SUGGEST THAT THE GOVERNMENT TAKE THE RHETORIC OF DECENTRALIZATION SERIOUSLY, BUT INSTEAD OF DECENTRALIZING FISCAL POWER OR CONSTITUTIONAL POWER WHAT THEY SHOULD DO IS DECENTRALIZE IN A FUNDAMENTAL WAY THE ADMINISTRATION OF... PROGRAMS" SUCH AS UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE, MEDICINE, HOSPITALIZATION, AND HOUSING.) BROADBENT ALSO PLACED MAJOR EMPHASIS ON THE NDP POSITION THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR A MASSIVE PROGRAM TO DEAL WITH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THAT THE CURRENT HIGH LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT IS ONE OF REASONS FOR DISUNITY IN THE COUNTRY.

6. OTHER SPEAKERS. SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIAL

CREDIT PARTY OF CANADA, GILBERT RONDEAU ATTACKED THE STATUS QUO POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT AND CALLED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO DRAFT A NEW CONFIDENTIAL

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CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD ENABLE THE PROVINCES TO "RECOVER AND ASSUME ALL THE POWERS WHICH BELONG TO THEM". IN THE ENSUING DEBATE, NUMEROUS OTHER MP'S SPOKE, LARGELY ECHOING THE THEMES ENUNCIATED EARLIER BY THEIR PARTY LEADERS. THE PRESS GAVE PROMINENT ATTENTION TO FORMER CONSERVATIVE LEADER ROBERT STANFIELD WHO SHARPLY CRITICIZED TRUDEAU FOR ALLEGEDLY EXPLOITING THE QUEBEC ISSUE FOR PARTISAN PURPOSES AND FOR RISKING "THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY ON A SHOOT-OUT BETWEEN HIMSELF AND RENE LEVESQUE."

7. COMMENT: PERHAPS IF THIS DEBATE ON NATIONAL UNITY HAD BEEN HELD EARLY THIS YEAR, IT WOULD HAVE ATTRACTED MORE ATTENTION AND PRODUCED MORE FIREWORKS, BUT OCCURRING SOME EIGHT MONTHS AFTER THE PQ ELECTORAL VICTORY AND LATE IN THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, IT PRODUCED NO REAL NEW IDEAS ON PRESERVING CANADIAN UNITY, AND IT FAILED TO CATCH THE PUBLIC EYE. STILL, THE DEBATE DID HELP TO CLARIFY THE ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PARTIES IN THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE QUEBEC PROBLEM.

8. DESPITE ALL HIS RHETORIC ABOUT WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER CHANGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OTTAWA AND THE PROVINCES, IT IS CLEAR THAT TRUDEAU IS STILL FOLLOWING A STATUS QUO APPROACH TO THIS ISSUE. HE MAINTAINS THIS COURSE, WE BELIEVE, PARTLY BECAUSE HE IS PHILOSOPHICALLY A CENTRALIST IN HIS CONCEPT OF FEDERALISM AND PARTLY BECAUSE HE CANNOT SEE NATIONALISM IN QUEBEC OTHER THAN AS A DARK, NEGATIVE, INWARD-LOOKING FORCE. HE PROBABLY RECOGNIZES THAT HE EVENTUALLY WILL HAVE TO SPELL OUT THE NATURE OF THE ADJUSTMENTS THAT HE IS PREPARED TO MAKE IN FAVOR OF THE PROVINCES, BUT HE OBVIOUSLY FEELS NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO DO SO, AND HE IS PROBABLY RIGHT. AT LEAST, THE ELECTORATE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE BOTHERED BY HIS LACK CONFIDENTIAL

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OF CLARITY ON THIS ISSUE, FOR RECENT POLLS INDICATE THAT MOST CANADIANS TRUST HIM AS THE MAN BEST ABLE TO PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THIS COUNTRY. ENDERS

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